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TOP SECRET

FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO WASHINGTON

pher/OTP

No. 8456

November 20, 1962

P R I S E C

D. 11.00 p.m. November 20, 1962

Replies
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Following is text of message received by Prime Minister from President Kennedy by teleprinter today (November 20):-

Begins:

I think it is time for me to give you a further account of the situation in Cuba and our present intentions with respect to it. I shall be discussing this matter on Tuesday evening at 6.00 in my Press conference and it seems to me important that you should have an up-to-date report before that time.

It is still possible that between now and Tuesday evening the Soviet Government will indicate clearly its readiness to remove the IL-28s promptly, without tying this removal to a series of unsatisfactory conditions as has been the case up to now. If such an assurance should be forthcoming, I will be able to take a relatively conciliatory tone in the Press conference, with respect to the Soviet Union, to announce that the quarantine can now be lifted, and concentrate attention upon the total refusal of the Cuban Government to accept any arrangements for on-site inspection and verification, as well as on the danger presented by Cuban threats to fire on our surveillance aircraft.

On the other hand, if the Soviet Government does not make appropriate assurances on the IL-28s between now and tomorrow afternoon, it will be necessary to focus attention upon this Soviet failure to carry out an important part of the understanding. In that case I expect to announce that a meeting of the organ of consultation of the Organization of American States is being called this week so that we can make a full report on the measures taken under the resolution of October 23, which authorized all appropriate action, including the use of armed force.

/Meanwhile, we are considering

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Meanwhile, we are considering further actions, which may involve response from the air to any attack on our surveillance, or a reimposition and extension of the naval quarantine, or perhaps both in combination. The logical way of extending the quarantine would be to add oil products to the list of prohibited items, since these are directly related to the operation of bombers.

We have a variety of instruments of pressure available, and the overall situation is somewhat less dangerous than it was in October because Soviet missiles are no longer operational in Cuba. On the other hand, we have to face the fact that a second backdown for Khrushchev may be harder in some ways than the first. For this and other reasons we see some advantages in concentrating any action we may take on Castro, from now on, if it can be managed. But the Soviets say that the IL-28s are still under their control, and until they are removed we have very little choice but to apply at least a part of our pressure against direct Soviet interests. Our thinking is further affected by new evidence that Soviet forces in Cuba are considerably stronger than we earlier estimated. We have identified elements of four Soviet ground combat units, with a total strength of perhaps 8,000 men, and the whole Soviet military presence in Cuba may be on the order of 12-16,000 men. We are making it clear to the Soviets that no real normalization of relations is possible while a Soviet military presence of this sort continues.

I expect to indicate clearly tomorrow that renewed action will be required very soon unless (1) the IL-28s begin to leave and (2) our surveillance continues without challenge from Castro, pending the establishment of better safeguards. Our precise choices among the numerous courses of action available to us will evidently be affected by what the Soviets and Cubans actually do.

In this general situation, while we believe that the main responsibility necessarily falls on us, we naturally value very highly the firm support which you and our other major Allies have given. If we have to go forward again, your continued support will be of the greatest importance, and meanwhile I shall be very glad to have the benefit of your own thoughts on this problem.

Ends.

[Copies sent to Prime Minister's Office]